

# Living the Story

## A Study through Scripture

### Introduction:

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Kyle Idleman has written a book (*Not a Fan*, I would give it 4 stars) that is built on the premise that we tend to want to be a fan of Jesus, but not really a follower. We have no problem confessing Jesus as the Messiah, and we will go to church, say the right things, give up things that do not mean too much to us, but ask us to live a radical life that is self-sacrificing? That, for many of us Kyle says, is beyond our ability to do.

While at times I think he overstates his point (hence 4, not 5 stars), I think it is worth reflecting on, especially when we come to passages like the one we are reading here in Matthew 16. What if we took seriously Jesus' call to give up our lives, that is, to really live only for him. To not assume that Jesus died for us (in a "He is only here to be *my* savior sort of way), but that we are to live for him and then actually live that way. What if we called people to discipleship of Jesus, not membership of our church? How would our faith look different?

Using Kyle's language, our basic question today is this: What if we were more of a follower, and less of a fan?

### Summary of the Text:

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Although I have just selected a couple of verses for today's lesson, the topic begins in Matthew 16. We have this great revelation in the book of Matthew: Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. Finally, someone gets it! And just like we so often do, Peter shows his ignorance of what Messiah really means when he chastises Jesus for saying that he will die. Messiahs don't die, Jesus. Why would you say such silly things?

Messiahs do die, Jesus says. In fact, not only do Messiahs die, if you want to be a follower of this Messiah, you need to die as well. Three things Jesus says to do here in 16.24.

First, we are to deny ourselves. The life we live is no longer our own. I learned a little bit about that when I got married. (Just ask my wife about sharing french fries, which is not one of my strong suits.) I learned a little more about that when I had children. Just this evening, I played dominoes with my daughter instead of doing what I really needed to be doing ... this lesson. What if we made every decision we made by first asking: How does this help me live for Jesus instead of me? Would that change how you spent money? Where you lived? Friends you have? Hobbies you engaged in?

The second thing Jesus talks about is taking up our crosses. I hope we have talked enough about this to know that taking up our crosses was not about wearing jewelry. The cross was an instrument of torture, not something shiny and gold plated. We would do better by saying, "Take up our electric chair." Are you willing to die for Jesus? Many of us say we are, but are you willing to live for him first?

Finally, Jesus tells us to follow him. I recently came across a Instagram feed that was primarily pictures of a girl leading her boyfriend by the hand into some location. You see her and just his hand, but there is no doubt she is pulling him and he is following. (According to the bio, she was always tired of him taking pictures, so one day grabbed him to pull him along. He took a picture and they began repeating the shot everywhere.) Now, this couple travels the world, so their pictures are of exotic places doing fun vacation-y types of things. That's certainly one way of thinking about following someone.

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### LESSON #26

**Date:** 3/10/2013

**Text:** Matthew 16.24-25

**The Story:** Chapter 25

**The Big Picture:** I have said this before, but will say it again. Too many of us say we are willing to die for Jesus, but are unwilling to even live for him to begin with.

**Materials Needed:** none

What if, however, this couple took pictures of them going into life-threatening places? What about places that stunk or perhaps were filled with shady characters? I am pretty sure they would not have as many Instrgram followers as they do!

And what about us? Are we perfectly willing to follow Jesus into the glamorous locations? What, preach in front of a thousand receptive people? Sure Jesus, be glad to! Be known as a member of the “coolest” church in town? OK, God, I will do it! Sell my home to have more money to help people in need? God, this wasn’t part of the deal? Move to a foreign country? Miles away from a Starbucks? And Internet? God, don’t you think you are taking this follow thing a bit too far?

Or is he?

*Preparing for the Group Time:*

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Be sure to answer the question about how well you are a follower versus a fan. Whatever your answer is, think of ways you can be more of a follower of Jesus.

**Living the Story**  
Lesson #26  
Text: Matthew 16.24-25

*Lesson Outline:*

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Have your group share their favorite professional sporting team (football, baseball, etc.). Ask the following: Why is this team your favorite team? What does it mean for you to be a fan of the \_\_\_\_\_? How does it benefit you to be a fan of the \_\_\_\_\_? In what ways is being a fan of your team better than being a fan of the team of (the person sitting to your left or someone else)?

Read Matthew 16.24-25.

Answer the discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

*Discussion Questions:*

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Matthew leads up to Jesus' instructions in Matthew 16.24-25 with two stories. The first is about Peter declaring Jesus as the Messiah, the second, a misunderstanding of what Messiah actually meant. Why do you think Peter struggled with understanding the role of the "Messiah?"

What do you see as the difference between the Messiah Peter thought of and the one Jesus really came to be?

In what ways does denying self, taking up a cross, and following Jesus actually seem to prevent people from following Jesus?

What is the benefit of following Jesus? Does our perception of that benefit change when we think of ourselves "taking up our crosses?"

In what ways do we attempt to, using the words of Kyle Idleman, bring others on board to be fans, rather than followers of Jesus? How do we prevent ourselves from doing that? Do we want to prevent ourselves from doing that?

In what ways can you be less of a fan and more of a follower of Jesus this week?

*For the Children:*

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Be sure to take some time to ask the children of your group what it means to follow Jesus. I am curious to know their answers. I wonder if they may know better than we do what it takes to be a true follower. I think they can teach us, even as we are being examples to them about being followers.

*Living the Story:*

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The way we live out this story this week is by answering and following through with the last discussion question. If we can determine the ways we try to be fans, rather than followers and try to simply confess Jesus without really giving up our lives, that is, living differently, then we have begun to take steps in the right direction.